



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# The Rights of Women in the Bible: The Beauty of God's Restorative Story

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The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry

# Is Gender a Good Reason?

Sections 

The Washington Post



Sign In

Acts of Faith

## God might not want a woman to be president, some religious conservatives say

By Julie Zauzmer July 20 



### Most Read

**1** Leave it to a Canadian ad campaign to deliver the most inspiring message of this U.S. election



**2** U.S. police chiefs group apologizes for 'historical mistreatment' of minorities



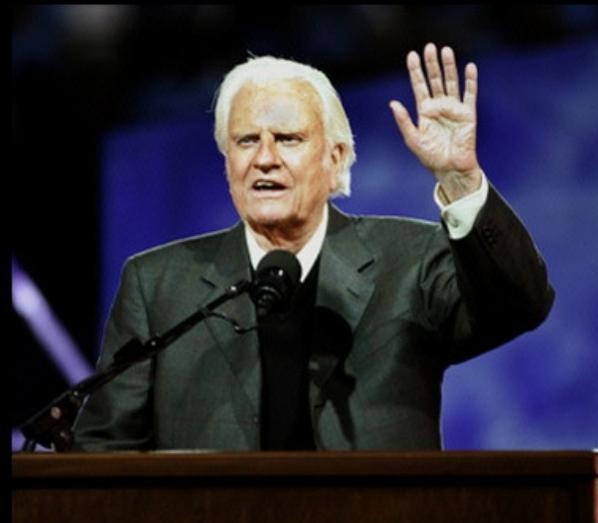
**3** The 20 stations Metro could close during off-peak hours to save money are mostly in communities of color



**4** Want college to pay off? These are the 50 majors with the highest earnings.



# A Male-Dominated Field?



# Outline

- Old Testament: Protections for Women
- New Testament: Protections for Women
- Old Testament: Opportunities for Women
- New Testament: Opportunities for Women

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- *Cohen v. State of Israel* (1981)
  - Mr. & Mrs. Cohen were separated; he violently attacked her and forced her to have sex with him against her will
  - After their divorce, she accused him of rape retroactively
  - He appealed his conviction on the principle that a man cannot be guilty of raping his wife
- Judge David Belchor noted the position of English law at the time
  - English law influenced the State of Israel before 1948

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- England:
  - In the 1980's and 90's, three cases dealt with the crime of indecent assault within marriage.
  - 'Yes' at the altar meant 'yes' ever after, even if the husband later contracted a venereal disease
  - Additionally:
    - *R v. Caswell* (1984): A married woman's consent to sexual intercourse covered all acts preliminary to that intercourse
    - *R v. H* (1990): The marital rape exemption applied even to an estranged couple

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- United States:
  - ‘Despite vast differences between the fifty states..., until the late 1970’s they all shared this in common: a man was legally entitled to rape his wife.’
  - ‘A husband cannot be guilty of raping his wife unless he forces her to have sexual intercourse with a third person. Immunity shields the husband even though all the other elements of the offense are present – force, penetration, and lack of consent. He is immune from a rape charge in most states, however violent the force he uses and however long he and his wife have been living apart...For instance, a wife whose husband comes home drunk every night and violently forces sex on her...is not protected by the rape laws of forty-six states.’
    - *New York University Law Review* 52 (1977): 306 – 323

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- Israel:
  - *Cohen v. State of Israel* (1981): ‘Judge Belchor stated that he was ‘delighted’ not to have to follow English law on this issue because that would involve endorsing the marital rape exemption.’
- Judge Belchor concluded:
  - ‘The people of Israel can take pride in the progressive and liberal approach of **their blessed heritage and the position of Jewish law on this matter from time immemorial.**’

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- Israel:
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- Judge Belchor concluded:
  - ‘The people of Israel can take pride in the progressive and liberal approach of **their blessed heritage and the position of Jewish law on this matter from time immemorial.**’
- Really? Why has Jewish law always held this?

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - The Bible
    - Considered divine revelation
    - Final organization ~450 BCE and 70 CE
  - The Talmud
    - The 'oral law' of the Torah (*Mishnah*, compiled 200 CE)
    - Further commentary (*Gemara*, compiled 500 CE)
  - Commentaries and codifications

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - The Bible
    - ‘In the image of God He created him, male and female He created them’ (Gen.1:27)
    - ‘He may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights’ (Ex.21:10)
    - ‘When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.’ (Dt.24:5)

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - The Talmud
    - ‘A man is forbidden to compel his wife to have intercourse with him.’ (*Talmud Eirubin* 100b)
    - ‘This Talmudic ruling appears in all the major codifications of Jewish law’ (Goldstein, *Defending the Human Spirit*, 2006, p.170; cf. Rambam, *Hilchot Ishut* 15:17; Tur and Code of Jewish Law, *Orach Chaim* 240:3; *Even HaEzer* 25:2)

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

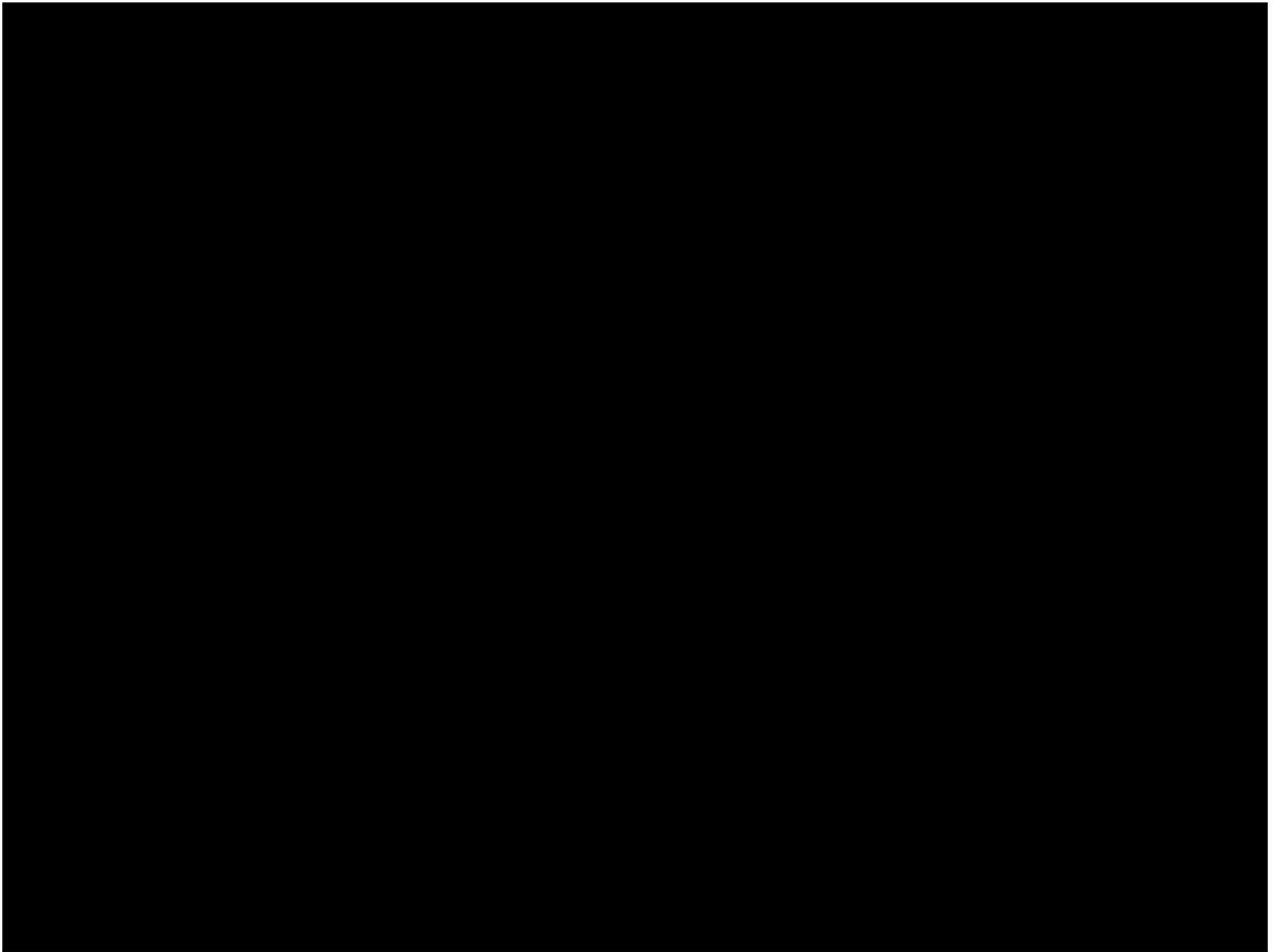
- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - Commentaries and codifications
    - ‘He may not rape her by having intercourse with her against her will, but rather, he must do it with her consent and in an atmosphere of open communication and joy.’ (Rambam, 1135 – 1204, *Hilchot Ishut* 15:17)
    - ‘If she finds her husband repulsive, she is freed from her conjugal duties.’ (Rambam, *Hilchot Ishut* 14:8, quoted by Warren Goldstein, 2006, p.172)
    - ‘Certainly she is not subject to him incessantly when she does not wish it...’ (*Responsa Maharit* 1:5)
    - ‘Even those who would permit [unconventional sexual intercourse] do so only when the woman is willing, but if a husband forces it upon the woman he is called a sinner’ (*Responsa Yaskil Avdi* 6:25)

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - Commentaries and codifications
    - ‘The vulnerability principle is the most influential one when it comes to Jewish law’s outlawing of rape in marriage.’ (Goldstein 2006, p.176)
    - ‘A woman’s conjugal duty is limited to having intercourse at certain regular intervals [‘determined with reference to, on the one hand, the wife’s needs and, on the other hand, the husband’s capacity’ (p.186)]...She is not required at all to ensure that her husband is sexually satisfied. He is responsible to guarantee to the best of his ability that his wife never feels unfulfilled sexual desire, which means that according to Jewish law a man must with great sensitivity constantly attune himself to his wife’s sexual needs...The reason is that fulfilling her desires constitutes a Biblical commandment, whereas fulfilling his does not.’ (Goldstein 2006, p.184 – 9)

# Example: Does Rape Exist in Marriage?

- What is Jewish Law? Sources?
  - Commentaries and codifications
    - ‘According to Jewish law, sexual satisfaction is primarily the husband’s duty and the wife’s right. Married women need legal protection to ensure that their husbands treat them sensitively in the potentially volatile area of sexual relations. Men do not need to be protected; they need to be restrained and educated to think of their wives and not to view them as their sex objects.’ (Goldstein 2006, p.190)



# Outline

- Old Testament: Protections for Women
  - Shaping Israel through narrative
    - Creation
    - 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'?
    - Hagar
  - Specific laws
- New Testament: Protections for Women
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# How to Read Biblical Narrative

- Grasp the story, and its literary conventions
- Understand the interactions



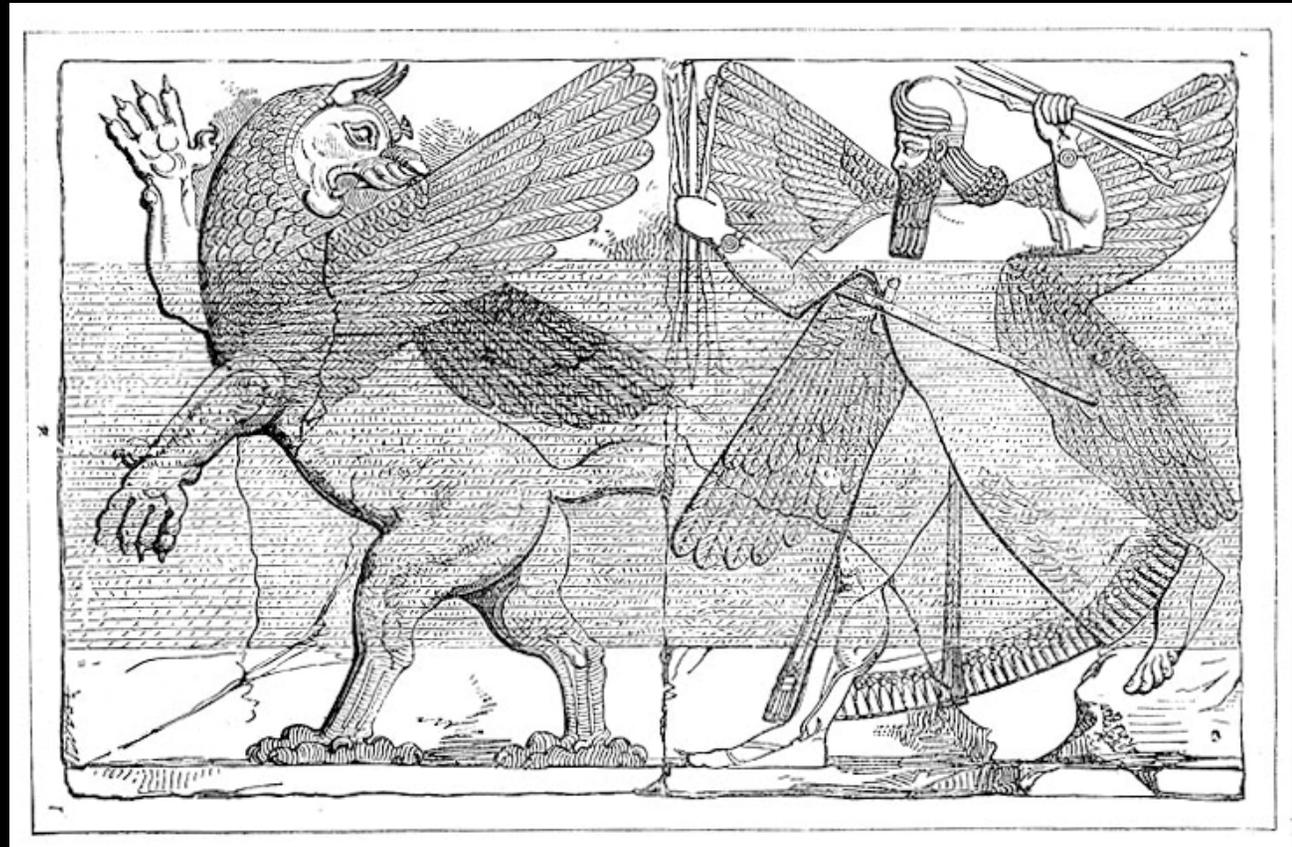
# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- In Greek myth, Pandora was created by the gods to plague men with mischief and trouble, to punish them for receiving fire from Prometheus



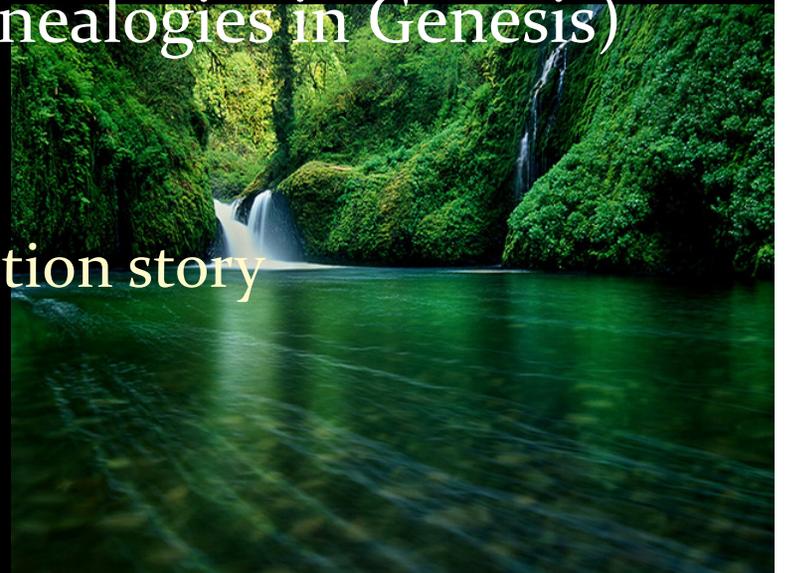
# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- In Babylonian myth, Tiamat was the first female being, a dragon goddess slain by the male god Marduk



# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 (introduction to Genesis)
  - Creation gets better and better
  - God made humanity both male and female (not just human kings) in the image of God
  - God's plan for us being image-bearers involves marriage and childbearing
- Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 (first of ten genealogies in Genesis)
  - Creation gets better and better
    - Man, Woman, Marriage (2:4 – 25)
  - Every new couple retells the creation story



# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- In traditional cultures, the wife becomes the lowest ranking member of her husband's family and has little to no standing – true patriarchy
- Genesis 2:24
  - 'A man will leave his father and mother'
  - Each married couple enters society equal with all the other households
  - Who wrote Genesis 1 & 2? Humans alone?



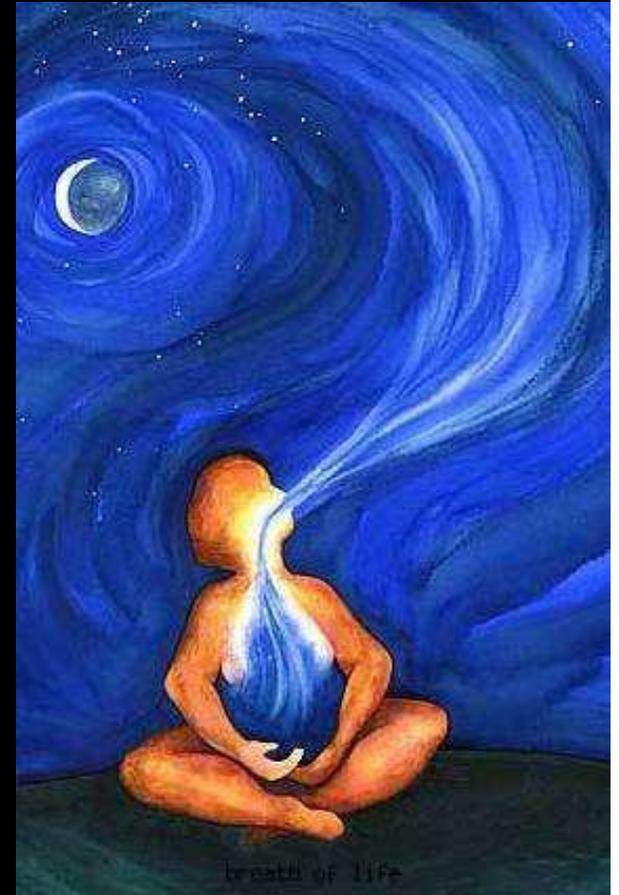
# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- Sociologically, for women to have leadership roles in society, the power of the extended family must be limited and checked
- Genesis 4 as The Fall, Continued
  - Cain further corrupted himself
  - Cain damaged his relationship with the land
  - Cain wanted to defy God and not wander
  - Cain built a city and named it after his son, Enoch
  - Cain forced his son to stay and farm
  - Cain prevented his son from 'leaving'
  - Dominance of older over the younger
  - Polygamy started in Cain's line



# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- Pr.1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake **your mother's teaching**
  - God's wisdom is from creation, and sown into creation (Proverbs 8:22 – 23; 32)
  - Both men and women were to repeat God's commission and speak God's wisdom



# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

- Sociologically, for women to have leadership roles in society, the power of *the extended family* must be limited and checked
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# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: God Fashioned Eve

- God 'formed' Adam as the potter 'formed' clay (Isa.29:16; Jer.18:4)
- God 'fashioned' Eve as Israel's builders 'fashioned' the temple (1 Ki.5:3, 5, 18)

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## In Creation: Eve and God as 'Helper'

- Twice, Eve is said to be a 'helper' (*ezer*, in Gen.2:18, 20)
- Sixteen times, God is said to 'help' or be 'a helper' (Ex.18:4; Dt.33:7, 26; Ps.20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:17; 115:9 – 11; 121:1 – 2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos.13:9) as a military ally or deliverer
- Three times, people provide, or fail to provide, 'help' as in life-saving and/or military assistance (Isa.30:5; Ezk.12:14; Dan.11:34)

# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Eve and God as 'Helper'

- What *ezer* does not mean
  - 'Helper' in a diminished sense
  - As if Eve were the inferior to Adam, or
  - As if Adam 'delegated' tasks to Eve and parsed roles with her
- God created Eve in order to save Adam from perishing on his own, a condition which God says jarringly was 'not good,' so that Adam might live and flourish
  - The context requires a robust understanding of the creational blessing and mission God eventually gave humanity (Gen.1:26 – 28) to spread the garden over the earth, down the riverways (Gen.2:10 – 14).

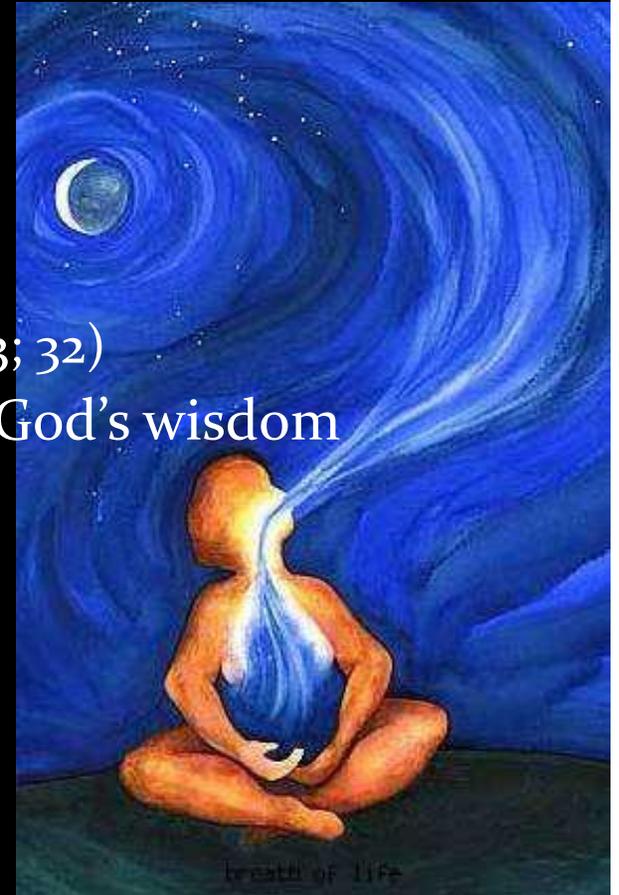
# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Eve 'Against' Adam

- The Hebrew is 'a helper against you' (Gen.2:18) – implies a potential opposition between wife and husband, which was interpreted by rabbis as a realistic view of marriage!
- *Genesis Rabbah* 17.2 – 3 explains this 'opposition' by making it a range: 'if he is fortunate, she is a help; if not, she is against him.'
  - *Genesis Rabbah* is a commentary on the Hebrew text compiled in writing between 300 – 500 AD
- The Greek Septuagint translation blunts the Hebrew text: βοηθὸν κατ' αὐτόν means 'helper corresponding to him' or 'helper suitable for him.'

# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Creation: Male and Female

‘Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and  
Do not forsake **your mother’s teaching**’ (Prov.1:8)

- God’s wisdom
  - Is from creation
  - Is sown into creation
  - Guides creation into fulfillment (Prov.8:22 – 23; 32)
  - Both men and women were to internalize God’s wisdom and bear it into the creation



# The Hindu Tradition



- ‘Men may be lacking virtue, be sexual perverts, immoral and devoid of any good qualities, and yet women must constantly worship and serve their husbands.’
  - Hindu Manusmriti 5.157
- ‘Women have no divine right to perform any religious ritual, nor make vows or observe a fast. Her only duty is to obey and please her husband and she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.’
  - Hindu Manusmriti 5.158



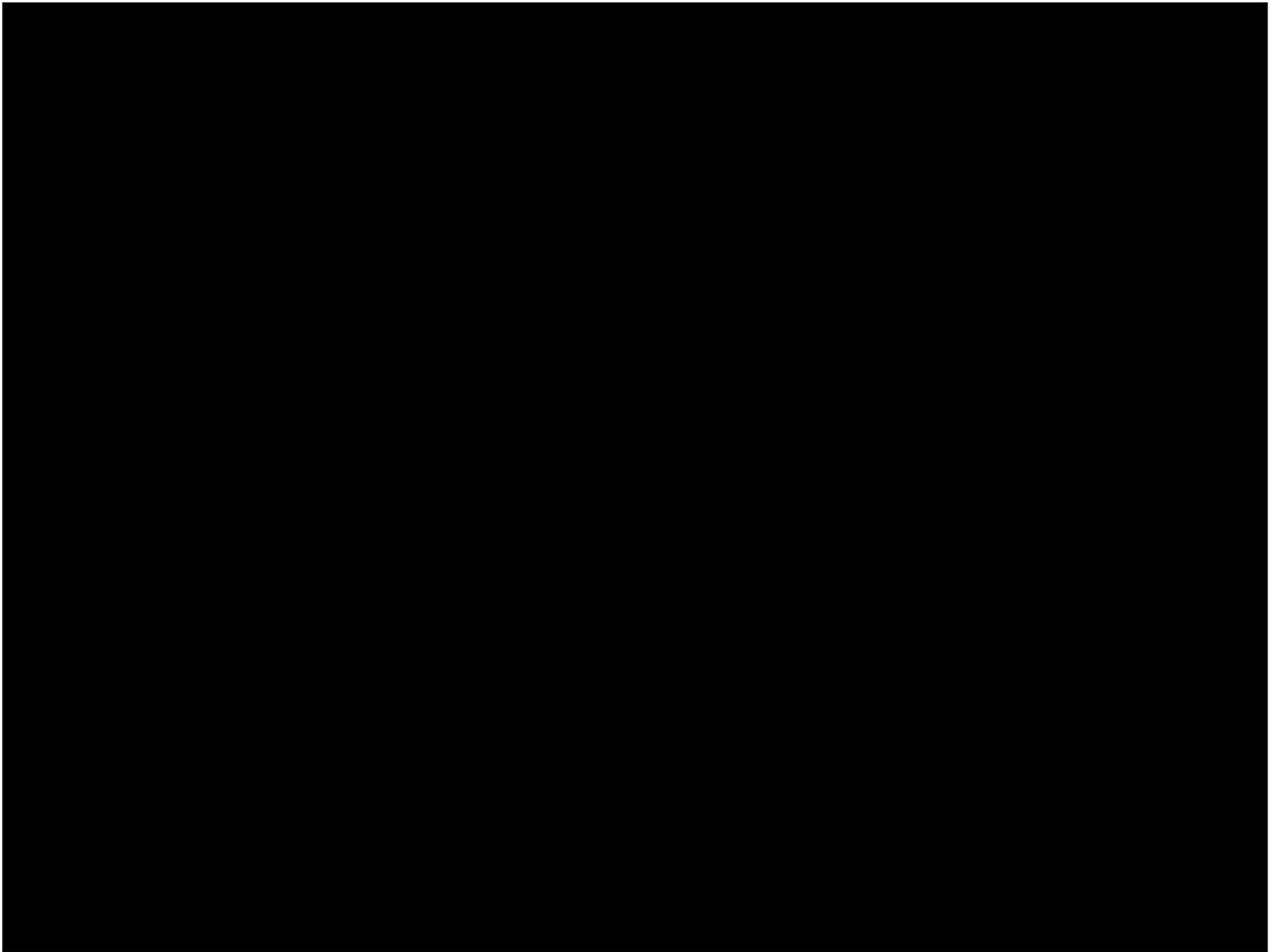
# The Islamic Tradition

- ‘If a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, and he spends the night angry with her, the angels will curse her until morning.’
  - Hadith al-Bukhaari, 2998, 4795; cf. Hadith Sunan Abu Dawd 2159 and Qur’an 2:223
- ‘It is not permissible for her to rebel against him or to withhold herself from him, rather if she refuses him and persists in doing so, he may hit her in a manner that does not cause injury.’
  - Majmoo’ al-Fataawa, 32/279



# The Islamic Tradition

- ‘No woman can fulfill her duty towards Allah until she fulfills her duty towards her husband. If he asks her (for intimacy) even if she is on her camel saddle, she should not refuse.’
  - Sunan Ibn Majah 1853
- ‘When a man calls his wife to fulfill his need, then let her come, even if she is at the oven.’
  - Jami at-Tirmidhi 1160



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# How to Read Biblical Narrative In Redemption: Male and Female

- Abraham and Sarah: Adam and Eve version 3.0
- God restoring His image in all people
- God's process shows His purpose and original plan
  - True humanity in a garden land
  - Bear more life through the union of loving marriages
    - 'the seed of the woman' (Gen.3:14 – 15)



# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar

- A. God calls Abram to trust His word, leave his homeland, gives promise of seed (11:27 – 12:3)
- B. Abram builds an altar, calls on the name of the Lord (12:4 – 9)**
- C. Abram and Sarai sojourn in Egypt, Abram lies about Sarai but God protects Sarai (12:10 – 20); separation of Lot (13:1 – 13); God's blessing of land and many descendants (13:14 – 18)
- D. Abram wars on Sodom and Gomorrah, rescues Lot (14:1 – 24)**
- E. God prevents Abram from naming Eliezer as his heir, again promises Abram seed despite Abram's old age (15:1 – 6); God promises birth of Israel from a hopeless situation: bondage (15:7 – 21)
- F. Sarai and Hagar: Sarai relies on herself and fails (16:1 – 6); God hears Hagar and promises blessing on Ishmael (16:7 – 16)**
- G. God's five speeches: (1) children, (2) Abram to Abraham, (3) circumcision, (2') Sarai to Sarah, (1') Ishmael (17:1 – 27)**
- F'. God again promises Sarah seed despite her old age; Sarah laughs, believes (18:1 – 15)**
- E'. God invites Abraham to pray for the righteous of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16 – 33) God implicitly promises to deliver 'the righteous' out of them
- D'. God wars on Sodom and Gomorrah, rescues Lot (19:1 – 38)**
- C'. Abraham and Sarah sojourn in Gerar, Abraham lies about Sarah but God protects Sarah (20:1 – 18); Isaac's birth(21:1 – 7), separation of Ishmael; God's blessing on Ishmael of land and many descendants (21:8 – 21)
- B'. Abraham plants a tree and calls on the name of the Lord (21:22 – 34)**
- A'. God calls Abraham to trust His word, sacrifice his son, gives blessing on the seed (22:1 – 19)

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Legitimate Wife and Heir

Hagar = Abraham = Sarah



Ishmael

Isaac

Eliezer

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Legitimate Wife and Heir

- God affirms His original creation order:
  - God works through the rightful wife: Sarah
  - God limits male power; God cuts off:
    - Abraham's ability to hide his wife (Gen.12:10 – 20)
    - His power to name an heir outside his bloodline (Gen.15:1 – 6)
    - His ability to father a child without Sarah (Gen.16:1 – 16)
    - Part of Abraham's penis! (Gen.17:1 – 27) **Any clearer?**

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Legitimate Wife and Heir

### Abraham

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- God gives blessing (12:1 – 3)
- Child from your body (15:1 – 6)
- God redeems his sin (12:10 – 20)
- God renames him (17:5)
- Abraham laughs (17:17)

### Sarah

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- God promises blessing (12:1 – 3)
  - Child from your body (17:16)
  - God redeems her sin (16:1 – 15)
  - God renames her (17:15)
  - Sarah laughs (18:11)
- 
- God wanted Sarah's faith, not just her body (Gen.18:1 – 15; Rom.4:16 – 25; Heb.11:11)
    - <sup>21:1</sup> Then the LORD took note of **Sarah** as He had said, and **the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised** (Genesis 18:9 – 15; 21:1ff.)

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Stellar Woman

Isaac = Rebekah

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Stellar Woman

- Rebekah: A Restoration of Eve (Gen.24)
  - ‘God of heaven and earth’ (24:3)
    - ‘Heaven and earth’ (1:1)
  - Rebekah speaks seven times (24:18, 19, 24, 25, 30, 58, 65), showing hospitality, faith, courage
    - Seven days of creation
  - Eliezer speaks ten times, comes with ten camels, bracelets weighing ten shekels; Laban and Bethuel bless Rebekah to be mother of ten thousands
    - God spoke ten times in creation; ‘be fruitful and multiply’
  - Rebekah was by a well, met Isaac by another well
    - Well of water in Eden (Gen.2:10 – 14); marriage by water
  - Rebekah takes the same journey Abraham and Sarah did

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

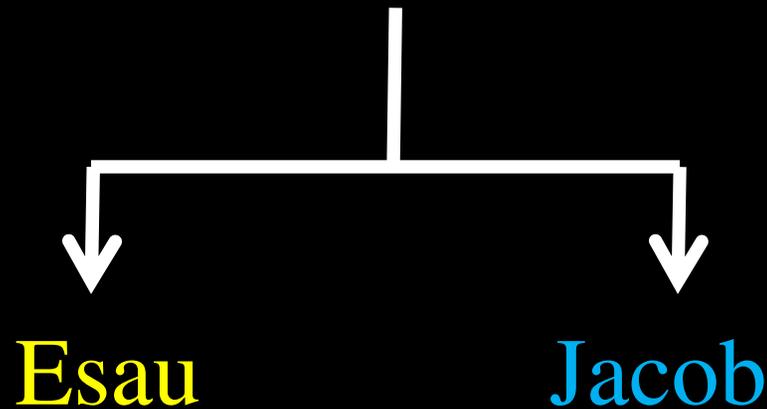
## The Stellar Woman

- Rebekah: Faith Over Stomach (Gen.25 – 27)
  - Rebekah prayed to ask God about her womb; God gave her the prophecy
  - Rebekah directed Isaac's appetite
    - Isaac was going to bless Esau based on his stomach
    - Isaac suspected, could have called for help, but just went along
  - Rebekah dressed Jacob in animal skins
    - God dressed Adam and Eve in animal skins
  - Rebekah was faithful to God, and prioritized faith over appetites in herself and her marriage
    - Adam and Eve prioritized appetites over faith
  - Rebekah was not 'a manipulator'

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Legitimate Wife and Heir, Undoing the Sibling Rivalry of Cain and Abel

Isaac = Rebekah



# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah

- A. God makes promise; struggle in childbirth; Jacob and Esau born; Jacob buys birthright (25:19 – 34)
  - B. Rebekah endangered in a foreign palace, Isaac lies about her, pact with foreigners (26:1 – 34)
  - C. Jacob fears Esau and flees the Promised Land (27:1 – 28:9)
    - D. At night, God speaks to Jacob in a dream (ladder with angels), Jacob names Bethel, makes deal with God (28:10 – 22)
    - E. Jacob meets Rachel and Laban (29:1 – 14)
      - F. Jacob must acknowledge the rights of the firstborn (Leah) and is vulnerable to Laban, Laban deceives Rachel (29:15 – 30)
      - G. Jacob experiences conflict between his two wives (29:31 – 30:13)
        - H. Rachel lets go of rights to Jacob; Leah bears children (30:14 – 21)
        - H'. God 'remembers' Rachel; Rachel bears Joseph (30:22 – 24)
      - G'. Jacob experiences conflict with Laban but accepts a handicap with his flocks, relinquishes his rights (30:25 – 36)
      - F'. God prospers Jacob and protects him from Laban; Rachel deceives Laban (30:37 – 31:35)
    - E'. Laban departs from Jacob (31:43 – 55)
      - D'. At night, God wrestles Jacob, Jacob named Israel, asks God for blessing (32:1 – 32)
    - C'. Jacob returns to the Promised Land and is restored to Esau (33:1 – 20)
      - B'. Dinah endangered in foreign palace, Jacob's sons lie, pact with foreigners (34:1 – 31)
- A'. God fulfills promise; Jacob named Israel again at Bethel; struggle in childbirth, Rachel dies; Reuben forfeits birthright; Isaac dies, Jacob and Esau bury him (35:1 – 29)

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

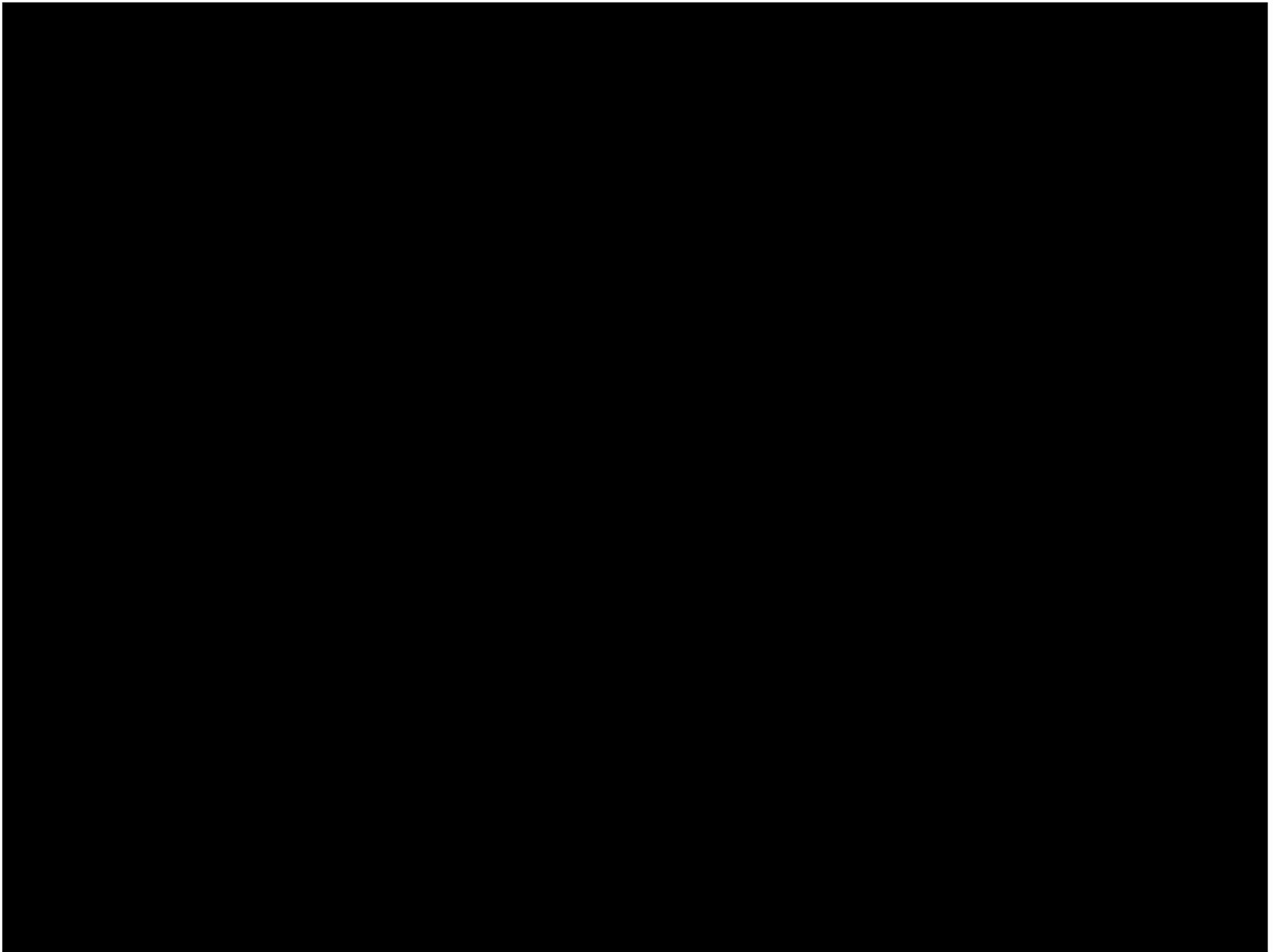
## The Legitimate Wife and Heir

	Leah	Zilpah	Rachel	Bilhah
1	Reuben (disqualified)			
2	Simeon (disqualified)			
3	Levi (disqualified)			
4	Judah			
5				Dan
6				Naphtali
7		Gad		
8		Asher		
9	Issachar			
10	Zebulun			
	Dinah			
11			Joseph	
12			Benjamin	

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## The Legitimate Wife and Heir

- God affirms **His original creation order**:
  - God works through the rightful wife: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah
  - God limits male power, and cuts off:
    - Isaac's ability to decide alone how to bless his sons
  - God calls the wife (not just the husband) to trust Him
    - Sarah (Gen.18:1 – 15)
    - Rebekah (Gen.25:22 – 23)
    - Leah and Rachel (Gen.29:31 – 30:24)
  - God blesses mothers to name their children:
    - Both Isaac and Rebekah name their children (Gen.25:25 – 26)
    - Rachel and Leah, not Jacob, name their children (Gen.29:31ff.)
  - God undoes sibling rivalry
    - Rachel and Leah, then Jacob and Esau, undo Cain and Abel



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- New Testament: Opportunities for Women
- New Testament: Protections for Women

# The Pentateuch: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Narratives
  - God cared for Ishmael but not Hagar (Gen.16)?
  - God sent her back to Sarai despite abuse (Gen.16)?
  - God then dismissed Hagar (Gen.18)?
  - Feminist theologian Phyllis Trible called the story of Hagar one of the 'texts of terror'

## TEXTS OF TERROR

Literary-Feminist Readings  
of Biblical Narratives

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Phyllis Trible



OVERTURES TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

Hagar = Abraham = Sarah



Ishmael



Isaac

Eliezer

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- Key question:
  - Is Not: How is Hagar's situation normative?
  - Is: What is the narrator's evaluation of Hagar and her situation?

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- The Literary Motif of Sight
  - Sarai 'took...and gave...to her husband' (16:3). Sound familiar?
    - Eve 'took and gave to her husband' (Genesis 3:6)
  - The narrator believes Sarai and Abram were sinning, despite it being culturally acceptable

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- The Literary Motif of Sight
  - **Saw** fruit (Gen.3:6), then nakedness (3:7)
  - Sarai was 'despised in her **sight**' (16:4)
  - Hagar '**saw** that she had conceived' (16:5)
    - Hagar's spite comes out of seeing and focusing on a human comparison; she does not see God's blessing and patience.
  - Sarai '**saw**' Hagar's spite in v.4 – 5.
  - Then, Abram had said to Sarai, 'Do what is good in your **sight**' (16:6), surrendering to Sarai's moral short-sightedness, relativism, and vindictiveness
  - After Hagar encounters the angel of the LORD, however, she knows that God **sees** her, and she has **seen** Him (16:13)!
  - That is a stunning turnaround of the theme of sight.

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- God promises Hagar that her son will be fruitful and multiply
  - ‘I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count’ (16:10)
  - God blesses Hagar to be a ‘matriarch’
- This is God’s creational blessing
  - Adam and Eve (Gen.1:26 – 31); Noah and family (8:17; 9:7)
  - Renewed with Abram and Sarai (12:1 – 3; 15:5; 17:2 – 7)
  - God blesses ‘the other woman and the other son’!
  - Notice her reaction: Hagar *names God* (*El Roi* – ‘the God who sees me’), the only person in the Bible to ever do this

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

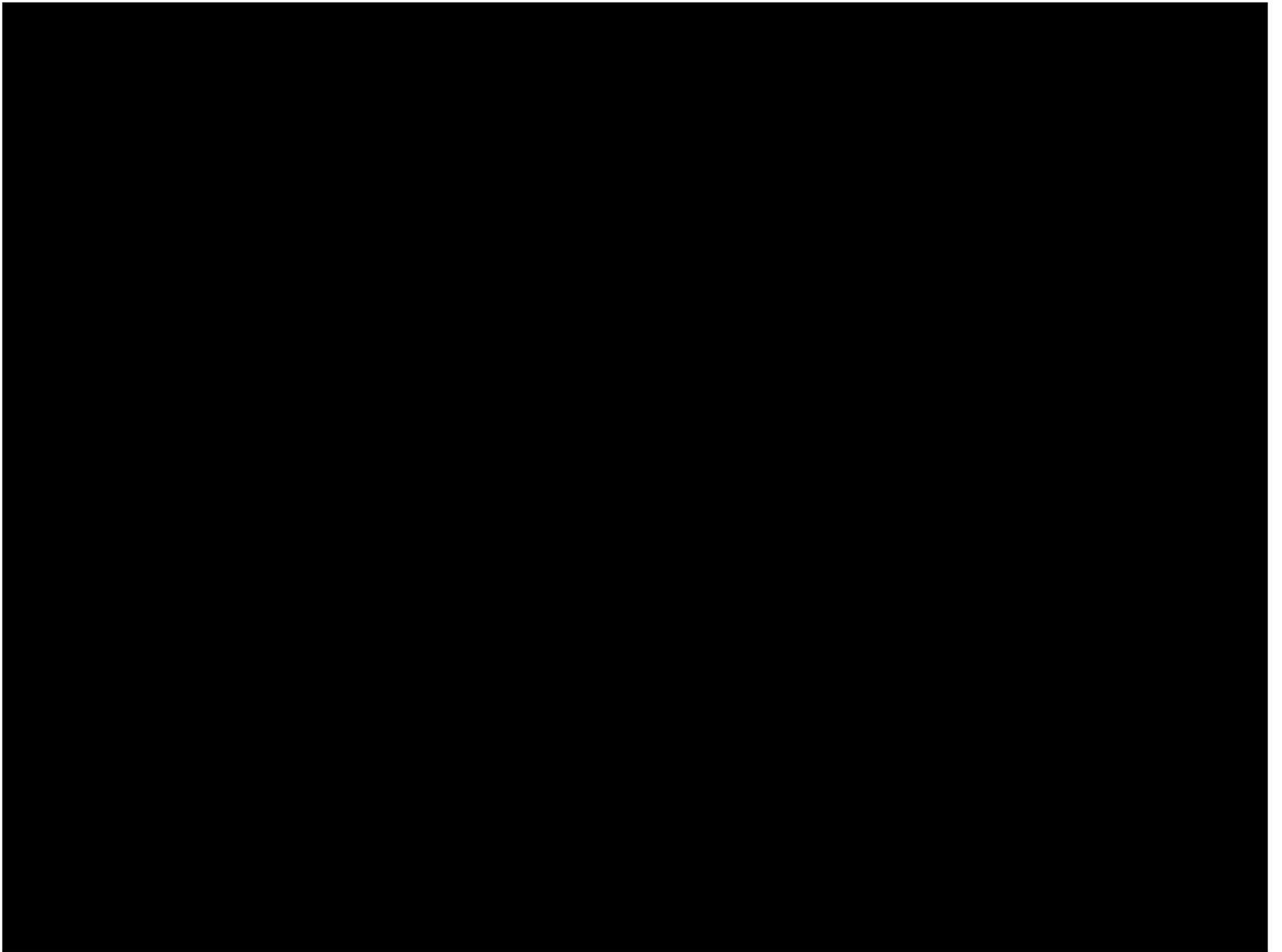
## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- God instructs her to name her son Ishmael, sharing with her the power of naming
- God instructs Hagar to return to Abram and Sarai. Why?
  - For Hagar to not express spite and disdain for Sarai but support and compassion (Hagar has higher status!)
  - For Abram and Sarai to change the way they relate to Hagar
  - For Abram and Sarai to embrace Ishmael and care for him
  - Abram and Sarai are a microcosm of God's future blessing of the Gentile world
  - Compare Qur'an: Hagar was 2<sup>nd</sup> wife; no reference to conflict, reconciliation, or covenant community

# How to Read Biblical Narrative

## Hagar & Ishmael in Genesis 16

- God limits power
  - Abraham's power as a patriarch
  - Sarah's power as matriarch
- God did not *cause* the male-privileged culture of the 'patriarchal' era
  - God was undoing it, correcting people's mistakes as they went.
- God renews Eden story
  - Abraham and Sarah become equal partners in marriage
- God redeemed Hagar back to His creational blessing
  - Undo Hagar's contempt
  - Undo Sarai's sin and Abraham's complicity



# Outline

- Old Testament: Protections for Women
  - Shaping Israel through narrative
  - **Specific laws**
- New Testament: Protections for Women
- Old Testament: Opportunities for Women
- New Testament: Opportunities for Women

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Personhood, Family, and Community
  - A woman's menstrual period makes her unclean (Lev.15)?
  - A daughter is more unclean than a son (Lev.12)?
  - A daughter did not inherit land (Num.36)?
  - Was a wife her husband's property (Ex.20)?
  - Could only husbands divorce their wives (Dt.24)?

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Personhood
  - A woman's menstrual period makes her unclean (Lev.15)?
  - A daughter is more unclean than a son (Lev.12)?
- What was being represented?
  - A man's 'emissions' were also unclean (Lev.15:16 – 18)
  - Death was unclean: scavengers, tombs, dead bodies, life passing into death (egg, sperm)

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Narrative
  - Circumcision: a symbolic 'cleansing'
    - Physically borne by the men, from Abraham onwards
    - Spiritually promised to both men and women (Dt.30:6)
  - Human reproduction is both holy (creation) and contaminated (fall)
- Sinai Laws
  - Circumcision reduces the symbolic uncleanness for boys

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - A daughter did not typically inherit land (Num.36)?



# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - A daughter did not typically inherit land (Num.36)?
- True, but land was stewarded for future children
  - God gave the garden-creation to Adam and Eve as a married unit, to give the creation to their descendants
  - Israel's garden land belonged to future generations, not to the present generation, and not individualistically



# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - A daughter did not typically inherit land (Num.36)?
- True, but land was stewarded for future children
  - Jubilee principle of restoring family land, freeing indentured servants to return to family land (Lev.25)
  - Jubilee possible by family land inheritance; individualistic ownership of land would have made this impossible



# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - A daughter did not typically inherit land (Num.36)?
- True, but land was stewarded for future children
  - Future children got a vote about land ownership
  - Israel commanded to care especially for those who could not own land individually: widows, orphans, aliens (e.g. Dt.10:18; 14:29; 16:11 – 14; 24:17 – 22; 26:12 – 13; 27:19)

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

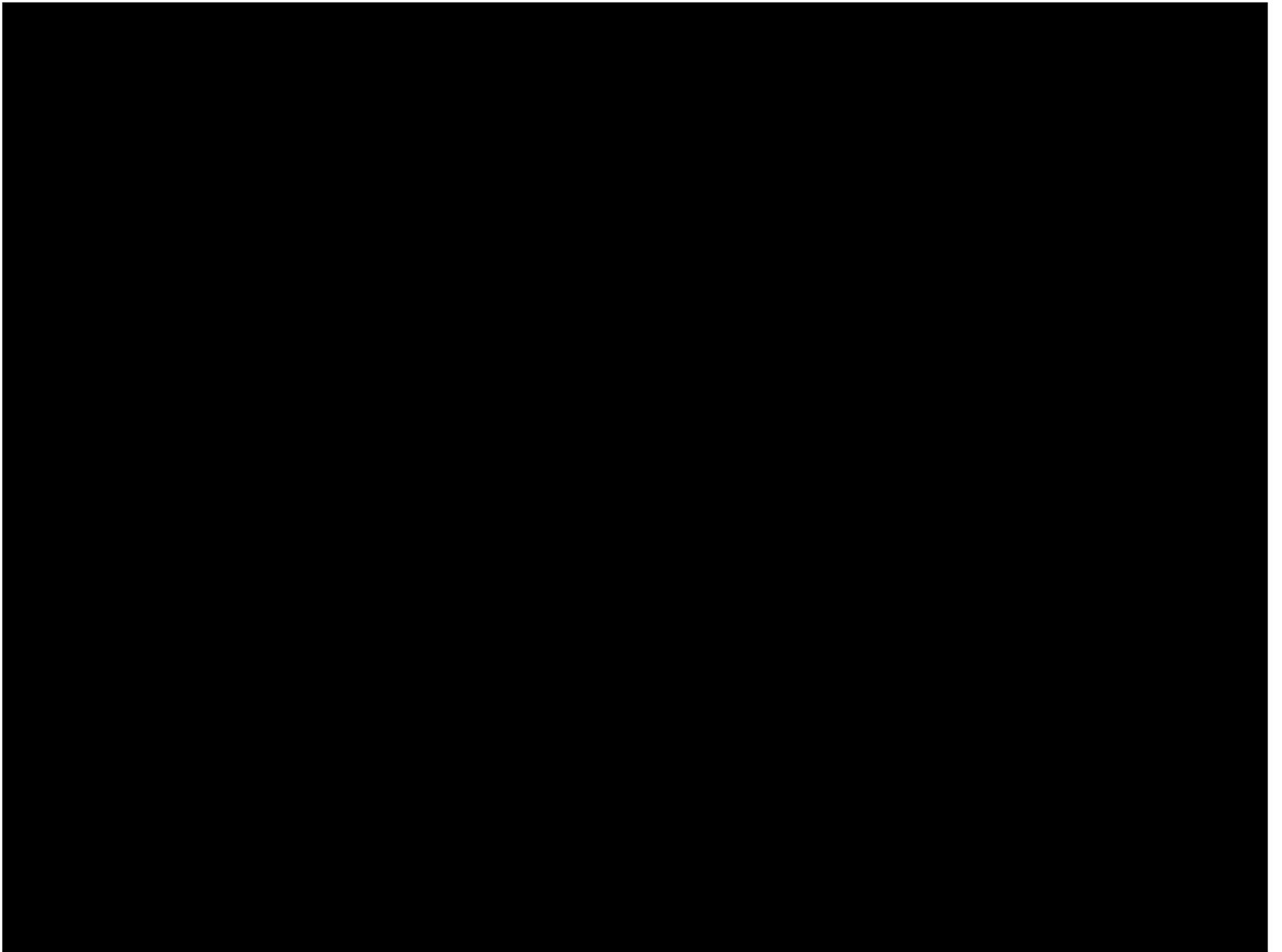
- Laws: Family
  - Was a wife her husband's property (Ex.20:17)?
    - 'Do not covet your neighbor's house...his wife...or his ox...'
- No: Just because the list contains people *and* objects doesn't mean that people *were* objects
  - Coveting applies to objects, relations, qualities, experiences, etc.
  - See my material on slavery:  
<https://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery>
    - Slavery in the Bible
    - Slavery in Christianity 1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - Was a wife her husband's property (Ex.20:17)?
    - 'Do not covet your neighbor's house...his wife...or his ox...'
- No: Wives could retain their own property separately from her husband.
  - Jesus' parable of the lost coin: woman searches for one of ten coins, a set (Lk.15:8 – 10), given by her husband to her father and then to the woman; it was not conditioned on her marriage (the so-called 'bride-price' of Ex.22:16 – 17).
  - Married American women didn't have full legal control over their own financial assets until after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Kirchberg v. Feenstra* in 1981.

# The Pentateuch Laws: Some Apparently Misogynistic Passages

- Laws: Family
  - Could only husbands divorce their wives (Dt.24:1 – 4)?
- No. Wives could divorce their husbands
  - Jesus affirmed wives could divorce husbands (Mk.10:12)
  - Hebrew was a gendered language, so this was the inclusive male tense that includes the female (e.g. Jn.4:14; 1 Tim.5:18)
  - Elephantini from Egypt (5<sup>th</sup> cent BCE) also shows women divorcing their husbands
  - Greek cultural influence in Israel in the 5<sup>th</sup> cent BCE influenced rabbinical interpretation negatively



# Outline

- Old Testament: Protections for Women
- **New Testament: Protections for Women**
- Old Testament: Opportunities for Women
- New Testament: Opportunities for Women

# New Testament: Protections for Women

- Caveat: The church was a voluntary community and did not have a state or a land
- Relational standards and recourse
  - Appeal to church leaders in case of domestic abuse, etc. (Matthew 18:15 – 20)
  - Excommunication possible (1 Corinthians 5:1 – 13)

# Early Church: 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries

- Prostitution was sinful, but the *male customer* was to blame
  - ‘Despite its condemnation of all premarital and extramarital sexual activity, the Church recognized prostitution to be an inevitable feature of worldly society, which it had no hope or ambition to reform... Canonical wrath was focused, rather, on those who profited from this commerce, for, while prostitution was regarded as a social phenomenon distinct from the sin of fornication, procuring was considered by the Church to be synonymous with the sinful act of encouraging debauch (since the latter is usually associated with a pecuniary motive, whereas fornication can be committed out of passion as well as out of desire for money). **Procuring was therefore considered to be a matter of spiritual jurisdiction, and strong measures were taken against it at the Council of Elvira (c. 300), whose canons were included in most of the major canon-law collections of the Middle Ages.** Leah Lydia Oates, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, p.12 – 13

# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 313 AD: Constantine converts to Christianity, issues Edict of Milan (tolerance, not theocracy)
- 315 AD: Constantine imposes the death penalty on those who kidnap and enslave children (especially girls)
- 318 AD: Constantine declares infanticide (especially girls) to be a crime, later forbids separating slave families, and permits manumission before a bishop.



# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 322 AD: Constantine financially helps parents
  - In response to economic distress in Italy and North Africa.
  - ‘If any parent should report that he has offspring which on account of poverty he is not able to rear, there shall be no delay in issuing food and clothing, since the rearing of a newborn infant will not allow any delay.’
  - Inspired by the Roman church (?), who had been running a food network for 4000 (?) poor people



# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 329 AD: Constantine financially helps parents again
  - Issues an edict in response to economic distress in North Africa.
  - ‘Therefore if any such person should be found who is sustained by no substance of family fortune and who is supporting his children with suffering and difficulty, he shall be assisted through Our fisc before he becomes a prey to calamity.’



# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 329 AD: Constantine grants that extremely poor parents can sell (rather than expose) their children, but are not immediately entitled to get them back
- 374 AD: Valentinian I mandated the rearing of all children, since exposing babies (especially girls), was still common, and would continue to be
- 381 AD: Council of Constantinople declares infanticide to be homicide



# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 525 AD: ‘Theodora had hardly been crowned when she started a crusade against prostitution... Brothel keepers and procurers of Constantinople were living off the earnings of poor women who were virtually their slaves.

Justinian and Theodora rid the city of them and converted a palace into a convent that might serve as a refuge for women who had escaped prostitution.’

- James Allan Evans, *The Empress Theodora*, p.31 – 32



# Early Church: 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries

- 534 AD: Actresses (also prostitutes) were free to leave the theatre; coercion made illegal
- 535 AD: Women cannot be imprisoned because male guards could rape them.
- 541 AD: Marriages between social unequals was permitted and legalized
- Divorced wives given rights to children, finances, estate
- Justin II: divorce only by mutual consent
  - James Allan Evans, *The Empress Theodora*, p.36 – 39



- Thank you for reading The Rights of Women in the Bible, Part 1
- To read Part 2, please find the link on [www.anastasiscenter.org/church-women-leadership](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/church-women-leadership)
- The full file can also be found at the page above